**Take Shelter—a movie review by Kathie Collins**

Written and directed by Jeff Nichols

Winner of the Cannes Film Festival's Grand Prize 2011

When storm clouds build in a film (or in life), we know something is up. Just not what, precisely where the havoc will strike, how long it might last, or how extensive the damage might be. Mother Nature's wild card, a storm is an unpredictable phenomenon whether it is meteorological, political, psychic, or some powerful combination of all these forces. We prepare as fully as possible based on the risk we can foresee, and then pray for the best. Mostly we come through okay—repair the damage and move on. The problem of course—or maybe the beauty—is that some of us are capable of foreseeing the worst possible kind of storms.

Such is the case in Take Shelter for Curtis LaForche (Michael Shannon)—a working class husband and father simultaneously struggling to make ends meet and make sense of the horrific dreams and strange delusions that have begun to brew in what was once his "good life" in a small Ohio town. Conscious of a family history of schizophrenia, Curtis is unsure whether his visions of apocalyptic doom are symptoms of the disease taking hold in him, or premonitions of a real event that will tear the world apart. Neither are viewers sure.

Director Jeff Nichols steadily builds that question, allowing viewers to be sucked into the vortex of Curtis's storm-centered energy. The lulls within the film and Curtis's life, which heighten his inner turmoil and a growing apocalyptic tension, become fewer and farther between as his panic about the impending storm focuses his attention on preparation. Since Curtis doesn't know whether his wife Samantha (Jessica Chastain) and six-year-old deaf daughter Hannah are better served by a storm shelter or his receipt of therapy, he attempts to attack his problem from both angles, all the while keeping his deepening sense of doom and panic from his family and friends. And, for a while, it seems that Curtis, a humble but bright crew chief for a sand-mining company, just might be able to hold such tension, drilling into the earth's depths by day while withstanding and adapting to the horrors that arise from the depths of his unconscious by night.

Shannon is superb in his ability to demonstrate the intricacy, paralyzing fear, and paradox of Curtis's condition. Chastain is also convincing as a wife torn between her devotion to the husband she loves but no longer understands and fear for her own and her daughter's futures. And Nichols is to be commended for combining such polished performances with equally well-polished special effects, which are at times subtle and at others quite spectacular, into a work of art that aptly conveys the sublime—a horrible beauty that can sometimes exist at the intersection of life's inner and outer weather.

Questions to consider:

What are the storms for which you spend your life preparing?

What various forces combine to form these storms?

Who or what in your history makes you sensitive to these particular storms?

Who or what must you protect from these storms?

What are the shelters you build? Who helps you to build them? How do you explain them to others? To yourself?

What life might you miss while you focus on building and taking shelter?

How are you, like Curtis, stoic in your ability to endure the wild winds alone?

Who are those you might finally trust with the terrible visions that appear as symptoms of both your inner and the world's outer weather?